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*THE TEACHING OF ERNST TROELTSCH OF  
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In these days of world-wide intercommunication, the hope of unity and demand for it among men are very strong, so strong that the optimistically inclined often think they already see the rosy hues of a dawn heralding the day of universal harmony. Perhaps these good people are right; but in no respect do modifying considerations appear more clearly than in matters of religion and religious thought. In these things racial as well as individual differences exist; and even between nations so near akin as Germany and the United States mutual understanding seems hard to attain. No doubt the average religious man in America looks upon Germany as a hot-bed of religious radicalism, opposed to all those principles of piety which good men wish to see preserved. There is ground for this opinion, in that German theologians have led the way in the application of the critical method to the facts of religion, and it is often still true, though far less than a few decades ago, that the theories advanced contain poison for the springs of pure religion. But this is not the whole of the picture. Besides the forces of stanch conservatism, which are as strong and as active in Germany as elsewhere, there exists also there at present a vigorous and increasing body of men, as much interested in religion as any conservatives, who are attempting to mediate the great truths of religion to the modern man, whose views are no longer in agreement with orthodoxy. To some these teachers may seem radical, but to those who realize that the great crux is the religious life itself and not this or that particular formulation of it, they convey a distinct impression of constructive renewal—renewal, because they reckon with the knowledge and forces of the new day; constructive, because they build upon and further the knowledge which the past has bequeathed and the forces to which man has ever turned for help and strength.

Such a man is Ernst Troeltsch of Heidelberg, too little known on this side of the Atlantic, but a man to be reckoned with in the future here, as he already is in his own land. That a new school will form itself about him is unlikely; his teaching is too individualistic for that. But many a student is attracted by his powerful reasoning, fearlessly critical of all the prevailing tendencies—orthodox, Ritschlian, Hegelian, pragmatic—and gets from him a deeper hold on the realities of the spiritual life and a stronger faith in Christianity as the permanent expression of that life. It is this broad aspect of Troeltsch's teaching which will interest us here rather than his views concerning the history of Protestant Christianity, which is his special field.<sup>1</sup>

The Hegelian school of evolutionary idealism<sup>2</sup> has sought to reduce religion to the "idea" which it postulates as the germ existing in primitive religions and developed gradually by evolution into its absolute manifestation in Christianity. Great as this conception is, and satisfying as it is to many, it is weak in every part. We do not know and probably never shall know enough about the real conceptions of primitive man to discover in them, in all cases, the germ out of which later developments have come; nor are we able to identify historical Christianity with the philosophic Absolute in the manner intended. Also, valuable and legitimate as the theory of evolution is, it will not stand the test when face to face with the great religious movements of the world. They defy the attempts to explain them by any theory of continuous development, for such explanations ignore the underivable, creative, and sovereign elements manifest in the great personalities which alone have given birth to the durable religions of mankind. Thus Troeltsch opposes such thinkers as Hegel, Schelling, Pfleiderer, and the Cairds, who

<sup>1</sup> The following presentation of Troeltsch's views is made from carefully taken notes of lectures and books, and undoubtedly many passages approximate closely to his actual words; but because of the uncertainty as to an exact verbal correspondence, the writer has deemed it wiser not to use quotation-marks, even in referring to specific books and lectures.

<sup>2</sup> (a) Lectures on "Religionsphilosophie" delivered in Heidelberg in 1912; (b) "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1895; (c) *Das Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft*. See *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, I: 4: pp. 460-489.

would make religion subsidiary to philosophy. Philosophy is right and necessary; but it can reach only a logically postulated unity without content. To reduce religion to that would make it no religion at all, and complete knowledge of it would mean its end.

The same result ensues with those who would reduce religion to mere aesthetics, as is done by Feuerbach and similar thinkers. According to these religion is a practical human creation, the poetic deification of human needs; the wish is father to the thought; and comforting and helpful as the thought may be, it is still an illusion. Illusory also is aesthetic pantheism, which reduces religion to art and makes of it merely a sense of the harmonious and the beautiful in nature. All such systems presuppose an illusion as an objective reality. But do the facts of religion support such a theory of illusion? If the wish were father to the thought, then fear and anxiety would be the only feelings brought into play; but as a matter of fact friendly communion is quite as prominent an element in all known religions as propitiatory expiation. The powerful religions always contain a mixture of the gentle and the terrible, which is far better explained as responsive to objective reality than as an artificial creation. The frequent absorption of independent cultural values by the religious life is not an idealizing process, for religion is not an idealization of culture. On the contrary, religion has often, as in the case of Israel and in Greece, tended to separate from set cultural forms, and the view constantly recurs that culture is the enemy of religion. For religion sets its eye on the beyond. The touch of the Absolute is upon it, an experience of something higher, that creates needs by establishing a gap between the ideal and the actual. To reduce religion, therefore, to poetic fantasy, which creates nothing new but only reshapes what is, would be the reduction of its fundamental sense of the Absolute to pure illusion; and this would mean robbing the world of all worth.

More common and convincing today is the derivation of religion from morality, or at least the conception of religion as a mere hand-maid of right action. Religion is thought of as morality colored by the Absolute, or, as Matthew Arnold described it, "morality touched with emotion." It is no wonder that the

attempt at such an identification should be made in a time when so much emphasis is being laid upon the ethical side of all questions, and indeed the two fields lie very near each other. Kant maintained that a moral law-giver was the necessary inference from the moral law. That is, religion is not a process of clothing the moral law with authoritative supernatural garments, but is the necessary and logical result of the categorical imperative, a result of morality and derived from it. Others hold that religion is a fanciful creation of human weakness in its effort to attain morality, which is the main thing, but which the average man finds it hard to follow for its own sake. That is, God is introduced to drive or inspire us to the great moral task of life, which in itself has not compelling power sufficient for the case.

Is either of these derivations justifiable? Thirty or forty years ago the usual answer was yes, but historical investigation has enabled us to know and judge the facts better. Not even in the great religions, where the moral and the religious elements are closest together, is such a derivation or identification possible. In them the first commandment is not ethical efficiency or righteousness but union with God. The other commandment may be "like unto it" but is not the same. Religion is ever independent, and does not spring from morality nor exist for the sake of sanctioning it. The salvation of the Buddhist is in the beyond, in a remoulding of the soul, and not in ethics; while the neo-Platonic communion with God is independent of good or bad action. In all the higher religions there lies this contrast, often an opposition, between the religious element, looking at "the things which are not seen and eternal," and the moral element, looking at "the things that are seen," temporal, practical, worldly. Over against the natural appeal to the moral effect of their faith by defenders of religion must be placed many instances of strong religious feeling coupled with great lack of morality, fanaticism indulging in extremest acts of immorality. This is lack of development, of course, but not hypocrisy, and it is conclusive proof that the two, religion and morality, are not identical or derived one from the other, but are independent. Morality grows out of social life in all its varied forms. Religion springs out of experience with the superhuman, and originally was morally indifferent.

The only method of their union would be through a fusion of ethics and religion. This, Wundt holds, has been historically accomplished, and the object of religion therefore is now really the moral law. Such a fusion has of course taken place, though it has never become absolute, and if it were so, it would not prove the origin of religion in ethics any more than the converse. Furthermore, that the distinction has always remained along with the fusion is shown by the periodical outbreak of one or the other against its companion element. Through ethics indeed there has come a deepening and purification of religion; yet, as shown so clearly by Nietzsche in the case of Christianity, all universal religions have a double ethics, one eye toward the world and the other toward heaven, a worldly morality and a religious morality. Thus even here the two elements exist side by side and remain different from each other. So, Troeltsch contends, religion is not to be identified with or derived from morality, any more than morality is to be identified with or derived from religion.

Briefly put, Troeltsch's course of reasoning is this: All thought must start with an analysis of the facts of the human consciousness—a psychological investigation pure and simple. The mechanical-naturalistic and association theories are not without value, but they do not explain the facts of the mind. It is the structural theory which best solves the problem. The mind has its several capacities, mutually related to be sure, but each independent and sovereign in its own domain. The logical, aesthetic, and moral elements of consciousness are sovereign within their own spheres, each operating according to its own principles and judged by its own standards. But the facts of human experience demand the admission of the religious consciousness also into this hierarchy of equals, in that it too constitutes an independent element of human thought.

The peculiar characteristic of this religious faculty is its sense of the Absolute, generated primarily in the great religious leaders of the world, and from them reproduced by various means among the mass of men in whom such original productive powers are lacking. The question of the correctness of this belief lies beyond the realm of psychology, in that of the theory of knowledge. Is

the sense of the Absolute, which is the characteristic mark of the religious experience, valid? Does it correspond to an external reality which gives it rise? Is it, in other words, knowledge and in correspondence with truth?

Troeltsch's answer has already been indicated. The religious sense of the Absolute is grounded in and arises from an absolute objective reality, which manifests itself in human consciousness, and especially in those great leaders of mankind whom we may call religious geniuses or prophets. Troeltsch is emphatically a theist, and a thorough-going personal idealist. Theodor Kaftan, in his misleading brochure on Troeltsch,<sup>3</sup> accuses him of being a pantheist. This is undoubtedly due to the latter's insistence on "inclusive" supernaturalism against the "exclusive" supernaturalism of the orthodox view. But, as a matter of fact, Troeltsch is as far from pantheism as he is from positivism or pragmatism, or from materialism, to which, according to him, these systems all more or less readily lend themselves. His conception of God is not unlike the "*force créatrice*" of Bergson, whom he is wont to mention sympathetically—a great, inexplicable Power who has done much in the world that is beyond our understanding and who cannot be reduced to the measure of the expected; inscrutable, yet revealed in human history, especially in its loftiest personalities; a Being who, when we consider the age of the world, the possibility of other inhabited worlds, and the numberless human beings who have lived on this earth beyond the horizon of known history, cannot be thought of as limiting his self-revelation to any one place or time. He must be thought of in personal terms, even though he cannot actually be compassed by the mind of man; separate from the world and yet immanent in it, separate from man and yet coming into communion with him. This is theism through and through. In it the voluntaristic and apparently non-rational elements in God's nature are so emphasized that Troeltsch feels himself in greater sympathy with the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination than many Calvinists themselves. He has indeed put himself on record as believing that this doctrine is today unduly minimized and underestimated. It is undoubtedly this element in Calvinism together with its

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, 1912.

capability for modern social tasks, that leads Troeltsch to count it superior to the Lutheran Church, to which he belongs and by whose stanch adherents he is in consequence not wholly liked.

All this means that the religious consciousness has as much right and capacity to supply valid knowledge to man as any other phase of his mental life. We have been for years too much under the domination of those who have insisted on the legitimacy of the logical faculty alone. The result has been a dogmatism on the part of the mechanical-naturalistic or equally mechanical intellectualistic theorists, who will not see the facts which testify to the presence in the world of a creative spirit whose acts cannot all be forecast or reduced to known rules of reason. Logic has its method of procedure, its laws, and its validity. So has the moral consciousness, by which the validity of the categorical imperative is established; so also the aesthetic sense in matters concerning the beautiful.

In like manner the religious sense of the Absolute may be deemed valid. Through long experience and consideration of the facts of life one may reach the intellectual conviction that religious faith is justified; that a spiritual interpretation of the universe is the right one; that "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world." But this conviction is not proof and cannot be used to prove the proposition to others, though as a supplementary confirmation of faith it is not to be disregarded. The religious object can be apprehended only through the religious consciousness itself; and it is only by means of entrance into the religious experience, by coming into direct soul-contact with God himself, that certainty can be set up and proof established. In other words, we are here in the realm of the most highly personal of all experiences, one for which other experiences of a different sort may give the occasion or confirmation but which remains distinct from them, unique, compelling, and self-evidencing; valid just as our sense of logical unity, of goodness and right, of beauty and harmony, is valid. No one may substitute even this theory of religious knowledge for the knowledge itself. All must enter in by the same narrow door, which involves conversion, not in the way prescribed by traditional theology, but in a broad



sense none the less deep; a new birth, a turning from the lower to the higher life, from material, temporal, and earthly things to "the things that are above, eternal in the heavens"; a personal communion with the Father of Spirits, which conveys to the believer that sense of reality without which religion is no religion at all.

Thus we come to one of Troeltsch's fundamental emphases, in many respects the most fundamental—namely, the essential subjectivity of the religious process. This element brings him into close touch with the mystics of all ages, for whom he naturally expresses great regard; with Schleiermacher, whose teaching as a whole he more nearly follows than that of any other man; with the Pietists, in spite of his condemnation of their Biblical literalism and anti-social tendencies; and finally with Ritschl, through whom largely, I suspect, in the contacts of student days, this trait was developed in him. Even at that time, however, his many points of disagreement with the Ritschlian school began to show themselves. Like all his past and present subjectivistic *confrères*, Troeltsch has at this point been forced to run the gauntlet of otherwise opposed but here united foes—the dogmatists and systematics of every kind, theological and philosophical, conservative and radical,—who hate nothing so much as a sovereign individual.

These critics Troeltsch meets by bringing out the essential relation existing between individual faith and the facts of history. While the mystic hovers in the immediacy of the eternal, oblivious of mundane actualities, Troeltsch maintains that theism must be based on the whole phenomenon of religion and its evolution in history. That he is himself unusually well equipped historically and has carefully considered what has been thought and felt in the realm of religion, even a superficial reader of his writings can see. In his article "*Was heisst 'Wesen des Christentums'?*"<sup>4</sup> he rejects the three main solutions which have hitherto been offered of the relation of history to norms—the rationalistic, according to which all history is but a blurred expression of a human ideal; the supernaturalistic, which employs authority guaranteed by miracle; and that of evolutionary idealism, which

<sup>4</sup> In *Die Christliche Welt*, 1903, nos. 19, 21, 23, 25, 28.

is the absolute realization of the Idea in history. All these, he says, have been disproved by the criticism of the last century; and he concludes, "The only other solution is that of the purely factual and irrational connection of a Reality, recognized as necessary and true, with historic tradition and experience." Every new thought and experience bears witness to that connection, flowing out of preceding thoughts and experiences but not being comprehended in them. Therefore there will always be devotion to the past, new creation of the future, and personal appropriation. The historic object never lies ready merely to be appropriated, but is always newly created, maintaining its continuity in a mixture of the historical with conscious, personal expansion and modification. This is not mere unbridled subjectivism, but a conscientious historical subjectivism.

Several of Troeltsch's outstanding convictions may for convenience' sake be grouped here, convictions which touch directly and vitally this question of the relation of the subjective and the objective, of norms and their historical embodiment. Like most Germans, Troeltsch is very apt to shift the scene from facts to presuppositions; and he does not hesitate to admit the legitimacy, nay to demand the necessity, of a presupposition in estimating history. The only question is of the range and accuracy of the experience of which the presupposition is born and then of its ability to stand the repeated assault of the facts. He holds that we have a right to presuppose not only the possibility but also the probability of the existence of original, spiritual values in history, values which cannot be explained by the purely naturalistic hypothesis; furthermore, thinkers of the naturalistic class are quite as open as the idealists to the charge of being unduly *a priori* in their methods. His rule for passing judgment on religious history is this: "We must consider that religion to be the highest in which the religious *a priori* value comes to clearest expression," that is, that religion in which the sense of the Absolute is most satisfyingly embodied.<sup>5</sup> The goal for which Troeltsch here strives is, as he says, the same goal for which Hegel strove, an efficient unity and a norm; but the method is different in substituting a teleological law of evolution for the Hegelian dialectic.

<sup>5</sup> Das Wesen der Religion.

But, according to Troeltsch, the religious *a priori*, the sense of the Absolute, is a matter of great religious personalities; for all durable religions have had their origin in the "revelation" imparted to individuals. Hence his great emphasis upon the religious heroes of the race, the prophets of Israel—Jesus, Augustine, St. Francis, Luther, Buddha, Mohammed. One of his issues with the Ritschlians, however, is at this very point. In spite of this emphasis on the creative religious individual, which Ritschl makes the exclusive basis of his system, Troeltsch insists on the necessity of estimating a religion not by its founder alone but by the whole course of its development. In estimating Christianity, for example, it is not the teaching and the person of Christ that constitute the sole test, central and controlling as they may be. It is the whole course of that organic religious development which began with the Hebrew prophets, culminated in Jesus, was mediated and extended through Paul, the Catholic church, and the Protestant movements, and is still with us, a living, growing, creative force. Thus we necessarily reach the conception of a progressive revelation;<sup>6</sup> according to which the Bible may be considered central and yet allowance be made for a present-day revelation as well, a revelation which progresses, but is sufficiently close to the old lines to unite with tradition and to be called Christian. In many modern forces Troeltsch sees just such a Christian progress. He sees it in the emphasis on immanence and humanitarianism; in the recognition of the unknown elements in God's nature, with the fact of the immense size of the universe; in the objection to miracles, and in the consequent removal of the gap between the Christian and non-Christian worlds. He recognizes Christian kinship also in the modern belief in a dynamic rather than a mechanical revelation, and the resulting opposition to all sacramental ideas; in the rejection of the idea of a lost world, given over by its Creator, which should busy itself only with sin and its removal; in the abandonment of the demand for comprehensive, systematic formulations of absolute truth considered as final; and lastly, in the opening up of Christianity toward the world and toward the idea that all of life is to be controlled by the spirit, that "religious experience" means a

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lectures on "Glaubenslehre," delivered in Heidelberg in 1912.

valuation and personal appropriation of all the elements of life. All these modern ideas should be looked upon as a real revelation of God himself in present-day life, the latest phases of God's self-manifestation to man.

Troeltsch recognizes the fact that most men in the world accept more or less willingly the authoritativeness of those views into which they have been born, but that for the increasing number to whom education is bringing independent judgment, religion is presenting an acute problem. With the outcry over the possibility of a new religion different from all that have gone before, or of a gradual disappearance of all religion, Troeltsch has little sympathy. The question for an educated man in doubt is not that of a new religion, nor of an intellectual sublimation of the religious experience, which would then be displaced by philosophy; nor yet again of a syncretism of various existing religious systems. The problem is rather one of estimating and choosing between the systems already before us in the world; not in the exclusive way of the Ritschlians and of many orthodox thinkers, who will allow no good outside of Christianity, but a choice, nevertheless, involving gradations and personal devotion to the religion of one's choice. The necessity of entering personally into the spirit of a religion in order to judge it and really to choose it is absolute. Troeltsch does not underestimate the difficulty of this task, but insists upon it and tries honestly to perform it himself. The historical judgment involved in this is something more than a judgment of facts, and something more personal and vital than a calm, unprejudiced, intellectual decision. It is contact of life on life, spirit on spirit; and the choice is an inevitable response of the whole man to the appeal of the vital force, the spirit, which is in the religion. This does not mean reading one's own ideas or ideals into the religion. It means rather judging each by its own standards, bearing in mind Ranke's famous sentence which Troeltsch is very fond of quoting, "Every age is direct to God."

This famous statement is all the more necessary because all religions and all prophets have been historically conditioned. All in history is relative. Both the universal and our idea of it find limitations and conditions in their historical manifestation.

An absolute is not to be found anywhere in history. So strongly does Troeltsch insist on this point that one is almost led to think he cannot find his way back to any norm, not to say the Absolute. But while he goes with Kant in emphasis on the relativity of history, he goes with him also in the method of establishing the religious norm, and still more with Schleiermacher in the necessity of overcoming this relativity by ontological, historical speculation. The norm lies beyond history, but it exists; and its existence, suggested by history, can also be traced in history. So Troeltsch says with Schleiermacher, "The spirit in mankind is not different from that which the Holy Spirit is also. We thus have in combination what appears to be both natural and supernatural."

Thus far we have been engaged chiefly with Troeltsch's historical method. It is time to call attention to his results,—to his own concrete judgments upon the course of religious history.<sup>7</sup> In this, as in most matters, his voice is clear and strong. Men's lives are really governed by a very few thoughts, and hence in religious history we have only to decide among a few great manifestations. The decision among religions is the more necessary, because of the increased significance of personally grounded religions and the decreased significance of individual production, which lessens the possibility of creating anything really new. The norm will have to be found in the strongest and best religion, appropriating only the best elements of the others. This means that we must root ourselves, if at all, in a historical religion, giving it at the same time the new emphasis necessitated by our new knowledge. We have to set up an end which can be seen in all the progress of history and to judge the different revelations by their depth, greatness, and power of drawing men to God. The norm, he repeats, is always subjective, a matter of personal conviction; but it springs out of a careful historical examination, conducted without prejudice, sympathetically and conscientiously. A final decision must come through personal conviction; knowledge must be bound up with earnest morality and piety. If the norm results from a comparison of religions, it implies a common relation

<sup>7</sup> *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte*; Tübingen und Leipzig, 2<sup>te</sup> Auflage, 1912.

of all to a universally valid, immanent element; not to an abstract universal idea, but rather a goal or ideal—a transcendental goal recognizable in its main outlines but whose full meaning transcends knowledge, an ideal manifesting itself in history only in individual, limited forms. Our search in history then is not for the absolute religion, but for the clearest embodiment of the highest valid religious truth. Is this a task so difficult as to cause despair? Consider the simplicity and unchangeableness of pure religion as contrasted with the changes in cultural ideals, bound up as they are with nature; yet the content of culture is, in its main points, simple and constant. If we think we can discern a fundamental culture in the past and base practical action on its principles, why may we not in the same way determine the principles of religion and consider it valid to win in like manner connection and unity for the spiritual life? In other words, why may we not hold that in the greatest human religion we see the victory of the purest and deepest thoughts of God?

The question now arises, "Is Christianity the greatest human religion?" This is a matter of personal conviction arising from a broad, historical comparison and not from an isolated consideration of Christianity or from an assumption of its absoluteness. The latter methods may give to some men satisfaction, but they will not satisfy most modern minds. On the other hand, such a conviction is a confession of faith; which is always a matter of jest to strict and narrow scientists. But these have no monopoly of science, and their own peculiar views of reality are not unassailable. Hence the main thing is a faith based on an inner appropriation of the great spiritual movements of the world. Troeltsch does not hesitate to affirm that such a faith, based on such an appropriation, will confess Christianity as the greatest human religion, the highest manifestation in history of valid religious truth. We must, however, consider Christianity in its entire historical manifestation; as an organic union of Hebrew prophetism, the teaching and person of Jesus, Pauline mysticism, Stoic and Platonic idealism, the Catholic fusion of European culture and religion in the Middle Ages, the individuality of Luther, and the moral earnestness and activity of Protestantism. This has indeed been the main line of progress and may easily be defended as the historic ground of our norm.

The primitive forms of religion are comparatively unimportant because it is a psychological error to seek to derive the higher religions from the lower through an analysis of the latter. It is only the great universal religions which can come into consideration, and among these the legal religions, Judaism and Islam, are less strong than others. It is among the religions of salvation that the real contest lies, religions which make a clear break with actuality and then return to it again with God-given power; and indeed among these religions, between two main types: that represented by inclusive Christianity on the one hand, and on the other by Brahmanism and Buddhism, which in some respects resemble the neo-Platonic and Gnostic systems. In Christianity, God and the soul are freed from the world, in that they are personalities overcoming nature; eternal worth breaks out of the depths to overcome what is. In the Indian type, God is pure being and the world is evil; salvation is the end of the world-process and means absorption of personality in the being of God. In Brahmanism, God is the abstraction of being, and salvation is self-salvation through contemplation and asceticism. In Buddhism, God is at once the world-order and world-fate, and salvation is self-salvation through breaking the will and right knowledge. Christianity, on the other hand, is the strongest possible manifestation of religious personality. It means a complete break between the higher and the lower world. It changes and does away the lower, through souls in the world which are made strong through the love of God. In a sense, it denies the world, and yet it affirms it as from God; and the combination of affirmation and denial results in the greatest strength that has yet been seen in the world. The choice therefore lies between salvation through thought directed to super-being or no-being, and salvation through trustful faith, by which we share in the personality of God, the ground of all life and worth. All the great interests of religion, centring about the conceptions of God, the world, the soul, and eternal life, are more independently and vigorously conserved in Christianity than in the competing group. Here the idea of God tends always toward unity, spirit, morality, and distinction from both the world and the soul. The conceptions of the world and the soul tend to distinguish

them both from each other and from God; a separation which overcomes contradictions and makes possible salvation through a higher life beyond the sense-life. Outside of Christianity all of these tendencies are bound down by the primitive view of God as an essence or force of nature, and of men as being and not becoming. The legal religions give the law of God, but leave men to work it out. The non-Christian, self-salvation religions merge the world and man in God's substance, but lose thereby all content and positive meaning for the essence of God. Only Christianity has overcome the persistent naturalism in religion, and revealed a living God who is doing and willing, as opposed to merely being; who unites the soul with himself in order that, saved, comforted, and purified from guilt and pride, it may work in the world toward the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God which is the kingdom of pure personal worth.

Hence Christianity is the high point of convergence of all religious evolution and opens a new kind of life. It is not to be identified with the absolute, since it is historically conditioned and limited in every form, and so we are not able to prove that it will always be the highest religion, i.e. that it will never be surpassed. But its supremacy over all previous religions and the fact that all real progress since its inception has been upon its basis, may give us good ground for believing in its permanent supremacy. Thus we may consider it the plane on which all further spiritual life will move, and yet withhold our consent from the proposition that it is, historically, the absolute truth. Troeltsch contends that this position is not only demanded by the canons of historic thought but is also implied in one of the most central ideas of Christianity itself, namely, its emphasis on the future judgment of God as bringing absolute truth. In other words, according to Christianity itself, absolute truth lies beyond this world. We must consider of course the possibility of the downfall of modern Christian civilization and the rise of other historical forms not related to Jesus of Nazareth; but even in such an extreme case we may believe that the history of Christianity would only be re-enacted. Hence Christianity represents not only the highest that has been, but also the future, insuperable religion, the militant, triumphant Kingdom of God himself. Yet we can



employ the term "absolute" in connection with it only in a perverted sense, signifying highest worth and the certainty of being on the way toward complete truth. This is all we mortals can achieve, but it is also all we need.

The estimate of Christianity just given is of Christianity as a totality, including, as we have said, not only the teaching and person of Jesus, but also the antecedent forces of Hebrew prophetism and the subsequent developments within Christianity itself—its apostolic, Catholic, and Protestant forms.<sup>8</sup> In this respect also Troeltsch breaks with Ritschlianism and its exclusive emphasis on Jesus alone. But at the same time he values in his own way the founder of Christianity quite as highly, and with certain limitations is in close agreement with Ritschl in a common emphasis on the necessity of a personal appropriation of the spirit of Christ. Jesus is for him the central force of Christianity but not the sole element in it; for the picture we have of the Master is mediated to us through his followers, and hence we must consider subsequent events and hold steadily before us the wide, historic, Christian stream.

This mediation through Christian disciples, even in our very earliest sources, has created wide-spread historic doubt. What can we really know about the historic Jesus? Does not our modern idea of individual freedom make us disdain to build upon external authority, or to stake our all on the possibility of demonstrating a sole historic event? Does not faith look up and not back, fixing its gaze upon a present or future goal, eternal and timeless, and not on an event of the past? We must certainly admit that in all history we are dealing with probabilities, and that the chance of error is large, especially in such documents as those which constitute our Bible, for they sprang out of uncritical faith. Thus it is not strange that we find many conflicting views within the Christian church itself concerning the essence of Christianity. A common conception is hard to find, but the great common impulse is easy to see; and this stream of impulse is easily traced back to its source in the founder, Jesus of Nazareth. Here is our historic connection, and it cannot be excluded from faith. If it were excluded, no cult and no religious organization would be

<sup>8</sup> "Glaubenslehre," *ut supra*.

possible, and there would be no impulse toward practical activity in the world, only a mystic, religious individualism without any concrete, continuous, ethical content. This is what happens at the break-up of every great historic religion; and if this individualistic mysticism is to be the religion of the future, it means the end of Christianity and the end of religion, a powerless humanity.

The centre of a great religion is always a person, its founder; and the essential element in any organization of this kind is the attitude toward this founder. All else is secondary. The cult, dogmas, and creeds are only expressions of this relation; but they are necessary as a vehicle of the common conception of the founder, for we can have organization only by means of some acceptances in common. This historic connection is not contradicted by the fact of religious autonomy. As in the other fields of human activity—law, ethics, politics—so it is here. We cannot create everything ourselves but are dependent on the past, unless we choose to be barbarians. Autonomy means only our own way of appropriating what is not our own production, the progressive continuation of that which is already given. This implies not subjection to the mere historic fact but subjection to the ideal which is clearly incorporated in the fact; for we cannot make a purely temporal, historic event the object of our faith, but only the meaning of the event, the timeless element incorporated in the historical sequence but not identical with it.

We are obliged then to separate our historical investigation from the religious valuation of its results. We must decide independently what are historic facts and then independently estimate them. Thus in a measure faith is dependent upon history, though history can never tell us what we must believe. It can only tell us what we can or cannot believe; for the very facts which exclude certain beliefs always leave room for a variety of other beliefs. Thus we are forced to consider first the historic facts of Jesus' life before we can talk of faith. It is not the details that we need secure but the main points of his preaching and of his personality. Is the tradition good or is it unreliable? Faith cannot answer the question. Here, as everywhere, faith is dependent upon the scientific establishment of fact, and, as not every one can investigate these problems for himself, most men

abide by the authority of their leaders. Still, the Jesus of history makes a clear impression upon simple instinct and common sense that is sufficiently in accord with the facts. For highly educated and scientifically trained classes, however, an individual historic examination is essential.

How then does the case stand with the Gospel tradition? This is no longer a matter of details but a great fundamental question. Are the representations of Jesus, to be found on the one hand in the ethical, rabbinical Synoptists, and on the other in the more ecclesiastical, mystical writings of the Pauline-Johannine school—are these of different origin? In other words, how are the teaching and personality of Jesus, with their prophetic affiliations, related to the cult of Jesus which sprang up so early in the history of the Christian community? Was the cult of Jesus an inner Christian development out of this teaching and personality, or was it due to a non-Christian cult attaching itself to Jesus? Troeltsch holds that the latter explanation is unjustified except in its emphasis upon the hiatus and the distinction. Of just such a mystery-cult we have no knowledge. Cults of this sort are known, but none of a kind of quality to explain the Christian cult. The gap and the changes in it do not necessitate such a theory and at no point in the apostolic history do we find any point of union. The theory is improbable in itself also from the analogies of other religions and other religious leaders. Mohammed was made almost divine without the help of any such outside influence, and the histories of the Buddha and of St. Francis show how easily deification can arise among religious followers. We have here therefore an internal Christian or Jewish-Christian development, against which no inherent impossibility can be urged; for it is clear that Jesus was an extraordinary personality and a teacher of the highest originality, who strongly opposed the ordinary view of life. Consider the combined effect of his teaching and personality, his own lofty self-consciousness, his striking death and the resurrection visions.<sup>9</sup> Out of all these things it is easy to explain the rise of the cult of Christ in which Jesus of Nazareth was worshipped, not

<sup>9</sup> Troeltsch considers these visions to have been psychological results of the memory of Jesus' personality; though the possibility of a real intercourse with the spirit of Jesus is not excluded.

as God, for this was not the original idea, but as Messiah and revealer of God, the complete revelation of Jahve, the fulfilment of the prophets, the revelation of the Father. Here Christianity reached its self-consciousness as a religion distinct from Judaism.

Many important historic problems still remain and will remain unsolved, such as the question how far the picture of Christ in the Gospels is colored by the faith of the early community; what Messianic words should be ascribed to Jesus; the precise manner in which the Christian faith and cult of the first community arose; the origin of the Lord's Supper. Here we have results and can only guess at the processes. But in spite of all the uncertainty, we can be sure of the main trend of Jesus' teaching and of the nature of his self-consciousness. He shows us God the Father, gathering his children to himself through his messenger, preparing them by counsels of love and devotion of will for the speedy coming of that Kingdom in which the divine life was to be made completely manifest; a lofty world-indifference for the sake of ethical and spiritual values, and yet a marked emphasis on and a continuation of the old Hebrew faith in a God-given world; a high Messianic consciousness directed toward a positive, present, spiritual end, the like of which has never been seen in the world before or since. Out of this teaching and out of this self-consciousness arose the Christ-cult, a faith in Christ not as a new God but as the saving revelation of God the Father.

Briefly put, these are the facts. What is their significance for our faith today? Primarily, the recognition of the permanent value of the ethical and religious personality of Jesus as bringing about in us a change of inward life and imparting confidence and strength against pain and evil. If we wish to bring this religious significance under definite categories, we may distinguish three distinct elements—Jesus as the revealer, not of a law or of a dogma, but of a life, the divine life and spirit of God, which can be described only in general terms, but is clearly felt and recognized by the appropriator; Jesus as the opener of the possibility of salvation, by whom the way to God is made clear, and by whom we are led in that way through trust, simple and direct, as of children to a father; in other words, Jesus, the divine guide; finally, Jesus as

the head of the community into which believers are gathered, the "*caput mysticum*," the vine whose branches we are or may be, the leader and Lord who does not prescribe dogmas but is the source of the life of the community.

Troeltsch considers the old ecclesiastical terms for these three functions very apt, though he of course uses them with a different connotation; namely, Prophet, Priest, and King, for the revealing, mediating, and leading functions respectively. In all this he is undoubtedly indebted to Ritschl, who used these three terms in much the same sense. There is further agreement between the two in their common emphasis on the kingly element, the element of will or end. Troeltsch also treasures the title "Saviour," recognizing it in the phrase, "the opener of the possibility of salvation." While strongly emphasizing the fact of sin and the necessity of its removal, he is more interested in the positive phase of salvation, which he pictures as a new birth and a turning from a lower to a higher life. He is particularly out of sympathy with the whole scheme of redemptive theology which the Church has built up on the basis of a mythical fall of man and its equally unreal preceding state of perfection. There is evil enough in the world, but the world is not under any such curse as our orthodox theologians would have us believe. Hence the whole Pauline and post-Pauline over-emphasis on the single fact of the death of Christ, and especially the later emphasis on this fact as the death of the God-man, working a change in God—all this to Troeltsch is outworn and untrue. God is ever the same, seeking to draw us to himself. Not only has Jesus shown us this most clearly, but the power of his life and death constitutes, through many channels, a compelling power to enable us to turn from the lower self to God and the life of God. This is salvation, and Jesus therefore is the Saviour.

Out of this arises a need that goes beyond the mere historico-psychological effect of Christ, namely, the search for a metaphysical ground, for an answer to the questions "How" and "Why." The modern emphasis has been as much on the historico-psychological side as the earlier emphasis was upon the metaphysical. Schleiermacher felt and responded to this metaphysical need and assigned to Jesus a peculiar, essential relation

to God; that is, a unique relation of essential being. Ritschl used the term "Deity" in describing this relation. According to Troeltsch, the presupposition is the permanent, central place of the historic Jesus in human history. Therefore, just as the ancients, thinking in their own thought-forms, conceived of Jesus as "the first-born of all creatures" or as "the means of creation," so we, thinking in our modern thought-forms, can look upon him as the central man, the Absolute Man.

The early Christians had to think of God through Christ; but to them Jesus was not a new God, but the Messiah, the Son, the Mediator, the Prophet that was to come, who was, in spite of all connections, distinct from Judaism. This was the apostolic idea and the basis of all later developments—God the Father in heaven, in close connection with his historic revelation in Christ, a duality of Father and Son but with the Son subordinate to the Father. The influence of the demand for monotheism brought out the doctrine of "Homoöusianism"—oneness in essence with God. This was an Athanasian emphasis against the half-way monotheism that lurked in the idea of successive strata of divinity from God through the Logos to the human Christ. All this was in the interests of monotheism, and the result was a homoöusian duality. Then arose differences of opinion with regard to the unity of essence between the Spirit and God. The final answer to this question was the trinitarian formula.

In the apostolic age the "Spirit" denoted the "spirit of Christ," and in Paul's Epistles we have three passages in which the "formula of three" occurs—"Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This is not a trinitarian formula in the accepted use of that term, any more than are the declarations of the Apostles' Creed in the same sense trinitarian. The position held in the apostolic age may be described as that of the "formula of three," or of an economic trinity; that is, a short description of the rule of God in the world and not by any means a hard-and-fast metaphysical formula. But through the medium of this "formula of three," on the basis of the homoöusian teaching of the duality of Father and Son, there arose the trinitarian formula. Here we have an immanent trinity. It is not a working formula, but a declaration concerning the eternal, essential, and substantial

reality within the mysterious nature of God. The historical emphasis of the apostolic age on Jesus and the Spirit is dropped, and a metaphysical emphasis replaces it. But though we may not ourselves adopt this way of thinking, we must not lightly reject its grounds or its justifiability for the age in which it arose. Notwithstanding the apparent cutting loose from history, we have, even in this highly abstract metaphysical statement, a legitimate connection with it through Christ as the revelation of God's love and through the Spirit as the spirit of the Christian community. So even in this immanent and most abstract trinitarianism, the historic foundation of Christianity is included and emphasized. The whole evolution is the result of an effort to unite religion and history.

But for us today the question is not whether this solution was justifiable for the early Church, but whether it really solves the problem for us. To this we must reply unhesitatingly, No. Such a cosmological solution cannot suffice today. The trinitarian formula stands or falls with the theory of Incarnation, and the latter is no longer a problem for us, for we base our faith not on an Incarnation but on a revelation bringing salvation. The only solution for us is to go back to the apostolic teaching, not because it is apostolic but because it is most satisfying to us as modern men—satisfying historically and satisfying religiously; back to the "formula of three," the economic trinity, a working formula of the rule of God in the world. "I believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, His Son, and in the Holy Spirit." This may be our final statement of historical religion. We need no special theories as to why it is so. In fact, we do not know.

A few words should be added concerning Troeltsch's views of the Bible and of dogma.<sup>10</sup> Since he considers Christianity as a great historic totality whose centre is Jesus of Nazareth, the historic source of that spiritual stream through which the world's greatest progress has come and will come, it is easy to understand his attitude toward the Bible. The Bible is the literary expression of the classical period of Christianity, and therefore is itself classic, central, unsurpassable, unless Christianity itself can be surpassed. Besides being the classic literary norm, the Bible is

<sup>10</sup> "Glaubenslehre," *ut supra*.

also a most important means of propagating the Christian life through the power of the personal elements in it. It is the personal element which really makes our modern Bible, for we now recognize authority and revelation chiefly through the personalities of men. In this way the Bible as a whole is significant, and a personal relation to it is far better than an intimate knowledge of critical theories. On the other hand, this does not mean any elaborate theory of literal inspiration. Look at this book with "*rein gewaschenen Augen*." Catch the spirit of its prophets and apostles, and, above all, of its Lord. We need no further theory.

Troeltsch's break with the orthodox conception is very manifest in his idea of dogma and creed. We have seen how strongly he emphasizes the necessity of a historic ground for our faith, lest we float away into powerless, individualistic mysticism, which would mean eventually the death of religion. He is just as clear and strong in his recognition of the place of cult and creed in the life of a religion. Christianity could not have become a world-religion had it not evolved its own peculiar cult, and cult means dogma. In fact, there can be no cohesive organization without cult and creed, no perpetuation and no progress. The only question is, how are we going to estimate and judge our dogmas? Are they truth absolute, eternal, unchangeable? If not, what are they? This raises the whole question of the relation of faith to knowledge, of the much-discussed problem of the relation of religion to science and philosophy. We may be weary of the discussion; but as long as the problem remains so acute as it admittedly is, both for individuals and for organizations, just so long will discussion be necessary and so long should it be welcomed, especially when a solution is offered as clear-cut as that of Troeltsch. No dogma is, has been, or ever will be, the absolute truth, for the absolute lies ever beyond the confines of human history. Man's nearest approach to it is in his religious experience, in which God reveals Himself. But this experience, this revelation, especially in our great religious leaders, is not and cannot be the direct object of our faith. Faith ever seeks something more tangible and fastens itself upon the historic deposit of that inner, mysterious life. The essential characteristics of this faith are



presented by dogma in what are really symbolic terms, thus establishing a platform upon which the members of the organization may stand. We have here therefore the symbolic theory of dogma already made so familiar to us through Auguste Sabatier's *Philosophy of Religion*.

Dogma then is not a scientific product set up by the logical faculty through a process of mere reasoning. It is primarily a religious product, symbolically formulated for practical purposes. It is not, however, absolutely independent of all our other knowledge, for it has to do with a general world-view into which our other knowledge must enter. In particular must we reckon with the results of the individual sciences of astronomy and physics, as well as geology, biology, anthropology, and universal history. Here, in spite of many disagreements and uncertainties, we find a growing body of accepted fact which no theologian may ignore—the Copernican view of the universe, the size and age of the world, and the like. These facts do not tell us what we must believe, but they do tell us what we cannot believe. Our dogmatic symbols must be made to harmonize with all this knowledge, or else they will lose the very practical influence and hold they were created to exercise.

The influence of philosophy is far less than that of the individual sciences just mentioned. It attempts a general unification of all science, and so is less secure than the sciences and cannot be so insistent in its claims. One may ignore philosophy altogether without seriously invalidating his dogmatic beliefs, but one cannot so ignore the results of science. Nevertheless, there is a relation between theology and philosophy which is real and important. There are certain philosophies with which religion can fraternize, and others with which it must be at eternal enmity for its very life's sake. Among the latter are pessimism, materialism, and parallel pantheism, together with those pragmatic-positivistic schools which deny the possibility of metaphysics though themselves metaphysical. On the other hand, religion can work in harmony with any philosophy of the idealistic and teleological type, whether it have the critical, personal, or more speculative emphasis.

So, while our dogmas are necessarily more or less poetic symbols, formulations springing out of the independent religious consciousness of man, they must, in order to accomplish their purpose, continually take account of the results of science and the tendencies in philosophy; and the religious life, remaining fundamentally unchanged, must receive new symbols, or be pictured by old symbols with new meanings, as the changes in our non-religious knowledge oblige us to readjust our view of the universe.

This presentation has been limited to Troeltsch's general views of religion and Christianity. Even this phase of his thought and work has not been entirely exhausted, but enough has been given to bring out something of the faith, courage, virility, and originality of the man. His chief efforts hitherto have been directed to work more strictly historical, as in his *Die sozial Lehre der Kirche* and *Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit*. The same breadth of view, scholarship, originality, and warm practical interest that we have already noted, manifest themselves in all his historical writing, making it vivid, interesting, and modern. We see that the sum of his thought is the personal appropriation of the great spiritual values of the outstanding religious personalities of the world, especially those of the Christian organism, and supremely Jesus Christ, Prophet, Priest, and King. While such men as Ernst Troeltsch live and work in Germany, religion will not die out, and just so long will seekers after truth from other lands be drawn thither, to return, not merely with a clearer vision, but with a warmer heart and stronger purpose.